

# **DESERT ACADEMY LANGUAGE POLICY**

The language of instruction at Desert Academy is English, and the goal is that students work successfully within the English medium.

## **INTRODUCTION**

At Desert Academy, we believe that the development of language skills is the foundation of success in all academic and career areas. In addition, communication skills are essential for understanding other perspectives, considering the reasons for and implications of differences, and finding commonalities. The purpose of the language policy is to:

- Ensure the effective delivery of the Desert Academy curriculum
- Require that language skills are developed and practiced across the subject groups and across the years
- Affirm the importance of learning a second language
- Ensure that all Desert Academy students have the opportunity to learn a second language

## **ADMISSION**

- All students entering Desert Academy must demonstrate proficiency in English.
- With few exceptions, students whose first language is not English are required to 1) take formal testing such as the SLEP or 2) demonstrate proficiency through some other means, such as a live interview via Skype.

## **LANGUAGE LEARNING**

### **PHILOSOPHY**

Language is the basic tool of communication in the sense that it enables a student to understand and be understood, and to establish an individual identity. Language is also the means with which one gains access to literature and thereby the cultural treasury of civilization. Across the curriculum, Desert Academy's program stimulates thoughtful, passionate communication about significant literary and cultural texts. We encourage students to view reading, writing, and discussion as processes of exploration resulting in further engagement with the world at large. To this end, our methodology stresses the writing process, including outlining, drafting and revision, thereby defining writing as a mode of thought.

### **LANGUAGE PRACTICES**

- All teachers will create an environment that encourages risk-taking and exploration with language.
- All teachers will model effective, respectful communication through their interactions with students and each other.

- Teachers will provide opportunities for real-life application of communication skills through activities such as field trips, visiting practitioners in a given discipline, and real world focused activities.
- Teachers will devote sufficient class time to discussion and discussion-based activities as appropriate for a given lesson.
- Teachers will introduce the concept of reading relevant “texts” to students, including artwork, films, advertisements, symbols, musical scores, and dance performances. The idea that all of these things can be “read” for meaning in the same way we read books should be explicitly taught.
- Teachers will teach specific vocabulary relevant to their disciplines.
- Teachers will use a range of writing assignments including journal writing, creative assignments, writing for a specific genre/academic discipline, brainstorming, outlining, and formal essay assignments.
- Teachers will require that students use an established mode of academic citation, such as the MLA style.
- Teachers will stress guidelines for academic honesty and integrity as they relate to plagiarism.

#### MOTHER TONGUE AND ESL SUPPORT

At present, Desert Academy does not have a significant population of non-native English speakers. In general, we enroll 6-8 international students each school year. Those in need of it can receive mother-tongue support in French, Spanish, Italian, or Chinese, as we have native speakers of these languages on our faculty. When the need arises, for either international or non-native English speaking students, the school establishes a class or provides a tutor to deliver English as a Second Language instruction. In addition, because Desert Academy’s mission and philosophy stress serving the individual student, teachers are expected to adjust their expectations to address these students’ needs. The school also allows and encourages international students and students whose native language is not English in grades 9-10 to take online mother-tongue classes as a seventh subject.

#### LEARNING SUPPORT SERVICES

All students at Desert Academy have access to a range of learning support services related to language development.

First, Desert Academy employs a Learning Specialist who works specifically with those students diagnosed with a learning difference.. The Learning Specialist works with the student, parents, and teachers to develop a plan for success including specific accommodations for that student. The Learning Specialist also works one on one with students in need of coaching in one or more of the following areas: study skills, organizational skills, written and verbal communication skills. For more information, see the Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy.

In addition, peer tutoring is available through the school’s chapter of the National Honor Society.

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STUDY AT DESERT ACADEMY

### INTRODUCTION

At Desert Academy, we believe that the study of languages provides a powerful means by which one gains understanding of other cultures and their means of communications. Our instructors and curricula encourage and inspire students to cultivate positive attitudes toward speakers of other languages. We empower students to develop an understanding of the nature of language and the process of language learning, and to reflect upon the cultural patterns that affect the thinking, feeling, and actions of the countries and communities in which the target language is spoken.

### THE MIDDLE YEARS PROGRAM

At Desert Academy, we offer Language Acquisition in Spanish, French, and Mandarin Chinese.

**Language & Literature courses for all students in grades 6-10 are in English and one Language B.**

Our goal is to encourage all students to gain competence and fluency in an additional language with the long-term goal of multilingualism.

Occasionally, we have students with a wide variety of backgrounds in second language study, depending especially on their language exposure prior to entering these grades at Desert Academy. As a result of this fact, the school recognizes that we must be flexible in our student groupings in the MYP years and provide classroom settings that match as closely as possible the level of proficiency of the students. To that end, we strive to place students in the level appropriate to them and not according to their age/grade.

### THE DIPLOMA PROGRAM / HIGH SCHOOL GRADES 11-12

All students in grades 11-12 are expected to complete at least one additional year of language study in addition to the five years of study completed during the MYP. However, students in grades 11-12 who are participating in the full Diploma Program or wish to earn Diploma credit in Language B must continue the study of a second language in one of the following ways:

- IB Language B Higher Level, Standard Level, or Ab Initio (Spanish)
- IB Language B Standard Level or Ab Initio (French).
- IB Language B Ab Initio (Mandarin Chinese).

When a student comes to us with a high competency and fluency in a language outside of our offerings, our DP Coordinator and a tutor will work with the student to prepare the student to sit for formal IB examinations in that language. (e.g., Japanese, German)